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Voters rating politicians' personality: Evaluative biases and assumed similarity on honesty-humility and openness to experience

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ABSTRACT

The recent rise in controversial politicians has garnered substantial interest in the assessment of their personality. Observer ratings of politicians' personality, however, may suffer from evaluative and value-related biases. Evaluative biases are likely to differentially affect personality ratings of preferred and non-preferred politicians, whereas value-related biases are likely to affect ratings of honesty-humility and openness to experience of preferred politicians in line with the self-based heuristic or assumed similarity effect. In a stratified sample (final $N = 203$) of the Dutch population, respondents/voters provided self-ratings and observer ratings of the political leaders of the seven largest political parties on the HEXACO Simplified Personality Inventory (HEXACO-SPI). Findings showed evaluative biases on honesty-humility, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Furthermore, observer ratings of politicians were generally lower than self-ratings on honesty-humility and higher on extraversion, suggesting high perceived politicians' narcissism. Findings on the value-related bias showed that assumed similarity was higher for honesty-humility and openness to experience among politicians of a preferred party than among politicians of non-preferred parties. Additionally, assumed similarity effects were also present for emotionality among preferred politicians and for extraversion and conscientiousness among both preferred and non-preferred politicians, suggesting a self-based prototypicality effect.

1. Introduction

Politics is not only defined by the clash of ideas, but—more often—by the clash of personalities. As a result, the assessment of politicians' personality has not only become a public topic of interest, but also a common scientific practice (Nai & Maier, 2018; Schumacher & Zettler, 2019; Visser, Book, & Volk, 2017; Wright & Tomlinson, 2018). There are reasons to suspect, however, that the perception of politicians' personality suffers from several biases. After all, voters often do not know a politician personally and, moreover, politicians may sometimes cultivate a certain image in the media that deviates from their actual personality. Therefore, voters may be guided by their political preferences, reflected in more favorable ratings of preferred politicians than of non-preferred politicians (i.e., evaluative bias). Additionally, when rating politicians, raters may be influenced by self-based heuristics (Ready, Clark, Watson, & Westerhouse, 2000; Weller & Watson, 2009), such as the assumed similarity effect (Cronbach, 1955), which may lead them to project own traits, and especially those that are

related to values, onto the personality profile of their preferred politician (i.e., value-related bias).

In this study, we investigate these two biases by having voters rate themselves and several politicians on the HEXACO personality traits. Based on party preference, we will explore the differences in personality perceptions of politicians of preferred parties (henceforth called 'preferred politicians') compared to politicians of non-preferred parties (henceforth called 'non-preferred politicians'). Furthermore, in line with earlier theorizing and findings (De Vries, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; Thielmann, Hilbig, & Zettler, in press), we will test whether the assumed similarity effect is strongest when rating preferred politicians' honesty-humility and openness to experience.

1.1. Evaluative bias in observer ratings of politicians

Interest in politicians' personality has increased substantially over the last few years, especially after the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the US (Nai & Maier, 2018; Visser et al., 2017; Wright & Tomlinson,

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2018). In politicians' personality studies, scholars have relied on external ratings of personality, which may be subject to a number of—mainly self- or (political) ingroup-serving—biases. The two most important biases that are likely to play a role are an evaluative bias and a value-related bias. The evaluative bias pertains to the tendency of voters to attribute positively evaluated traits to their preferred politician. For instance, Wright and Tomlinson (2018) showed strong relations between political preference of raters, including political experts, and their personality ratings of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Except for extraversion, raters scored their preferred candidate higher than their non-preferred candidate on Big Five agreeableness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Consequently, political preference for a political candidate seems to shape the desirability of the candidate's personality profile.

In our study, we use the HEXACO model of personality and thus we investigate whether voters see preferred politicians as higher or lower than non-preferred politicians on honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Additionally, we also compare voters' ratings of politicians to their own (i.e., the voters') self-ratings. We expected that, when compared to non-preferred politicians, preferred politicians are more likely to receive higher ratings on positively evaluated traits, such as honesty-humility, extraversion, and conscientiousness (see De Vries, Realo, & Allik, 2016; Thielmann et al., in press). However, trust in politicians is generally low (e.g., Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Dalton, 2005; Turper & Aarts, 2017), suggesting that people will rate politicians (especially non-preferred politicians) relatively low on honesty-humility when compared to self-ratings. Because there is yet not much research using the HEXACO model to assess politicians, we chose to abstain from formulating hypotheses and instead formulated the following research question:

RQ: What are the differences between voters' self-ratings, ratings of preferred politicians, and ratings of non-preferred politicians on the HEXACO personality traits?

1.2. Value-related bias in observer ratings of politicians

The second bias, i.e., the value-related bias, pertains to the tendency of voters to assume their preferred politicians to be similar to them on value-related personality dimensions, i.e., honesty-humility and openness to experience. For instance, Sherman (2018) found stronger preference for Trump among voters who scored low on altruism (cf. low honesty-humility) and high on traditional values (cf. low openness to experience). This is in line with findings of Lee et al. (2009; see also Thielmann et al., in press) that assumed similarity of liked others is higher on two personality dimensions, honesty-humility and openness to experience, two personality dimensions that are closely aligned with socio-political attitudes and values, such as self-enhancement versus self-transcendence and conservation versus openness to change (Desimoni & Leone, 2014; Jonason, 2014; Lee et al., 2009; Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora, Bourdage, & Shin, 2010; Leone, Chirumbolo, & Desimoni, 2012; Leone, Desimoni, & Chirumbolo, 2012; Schwartz, 1992). This assumed similarity effect for honesty-humility and openness to experience has been found in different relationships, such as family members, close friends, colleagues at work, and strangers (De Vries, 2010; Lee et al., 2009; Thielmann et al., in press). In these relationships, people seem to prefer to be acquainted or befriended with others who match their own level of honesty-humility and openness to experience (Lee et al., 2009).

Self-based heuristics biases, such as the assumed similarity effect, on these two value-related personality dimensions may play an even stronger role in ratings of politicians. Voting for a politician can be regarded as a highly self-confirming act, being strongly identity- and ideology-based (Jenke & Huettel, 2016), and thus voters are more likely to assume their preferred politician to be similar to themselves on

personality traits that reflect their socio-political attitudes. That is, the extent to which people perceive a politician to be honest and open to experiences may not only depend on whether they like a politician or agree with his/her ideas, but may also depend on the perceivers' own honesty-humility and openness to experience. In line with earlier findings and the reasoning outlined above, we therefore formulate the following two hypotheses:

H1. Assumed similarity of honesty-humility is higher when rating preferred politicians than when rating non-preferred politicians.

H2. Assumed similarity of openness to experience is higher when rating preferred politicians than when rating non-preferred politicians.

In short, perceptions of politicians may be biased because of political preferences, resulting in evaluative biases in observer ratings of preferred and non-preferred politicians' personality and value-related (assumed similarity) biases in observer ratings of preferred politicians' personality.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedure

The study was conducted using an ISO-certified panel. A stratified sample, to be representative of gender, age, educational level, and region, was drawn of Dutch adults entitled to vote one month before the general election of 2017. Of the 949 invitations sent, 323 (34.0%) respondents (42.4% women) filled out the entire survey, with a mean age of 50.3 ($SD = 17.5$), and with educational levels ranging from low (primary education, lower secondary education, or basic vocational education; 38% versus 31% in the population according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)), medium (higher levels of secondary education or medium-level vocational education; 38% versus 44% according to the CBS), to high (highest level of vocational education or university; 24% versus 25% according to the CBS). However, for the final analyses we only used 203 respondents (39.4% women), with a mean age of 51.2 ($SD = 17.3$), who indicated that they would vote for the party of one of the seven politicians that we included in our assessment.

Of the 13 parties that obtained a seat in the parliament, we selected the seven largest parties at the time of our survey. The party leaders of these seven parties were Mark Rutte (Conservative Liberal, VVD), Geert Wilders (Anti-Immigrant, PVV), Sybrand Buma (Conservative Christian, CDA), Alexander Pechtold (Liberal Democrats, D66), Jesse Klaver (Green-Left, GL), Emile Roemer (Socialist, SP), and Lodewijk Asscher (Labor, PvdA). To avoid respondent fatigue, the research consisted of two parts. In the first part, respondents filled out the HEXACO self-report and the HEXACO observer report of three (out of seven) randomly chosen political leaders (hereafter called 'politicians'). The second part, which was sent a day later, consisted of the HEXACO observer report of the remaining four politicians and a number of background and additional questions. The dataset is made available at <https://bit.ly/2C2XYZI>.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. HEXACO-SPI

To measure HEXACO self- and observer report personality, we used the HEXACO Simplified Personality Inventory (HEXACO-SPI; De Vries & Born, 2013). The HEXACO-SPI is constructed to be used in research on children (> 12 years old) and people with lower educational/reading levels, such as included in our sample. Because of its use of short and easy to comprehend sentences (on average 7.7 words per item versus 12.4 in the Dutch HEXACO-PI-R; De Vries, Ashton, & Lee, 2009), the HEXACO-SPI is also quicker to fill out than the HEXACO-PI-R, which we deemed important given the length of the survey. The

Table 1Descriptives and differences between self-ratings, ratings of preferred 'politician' (Pol), and average ratings of non-preferred politicians (Pols) ($N = 203$).

	Self-ratings <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Preferred Pol <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Non-Preferred Pols <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ^c	<i>p</i>
Honesty-humility	3.43 (0.43)^a	3.31 (0.50)^b	2.89 (0.40)^c	105.06	2, 404	< 0.01
Sincerity	3.24 (0.68) ^a	3.17 (0.65) ^a	2.69 (0.45) ^b	60.97	1.9, 385.8	< 0.01
Fairness	3.28 (0.65) ^b	3.48 (0.66) ^a	3.11 (0.50) ^c	30.99	1.9, 377.9	< 0.01
Greed avoidance	3.39 (0.57) ^a	2.86 (0.59) ^b	2.56 (0.44) ^c	140.94	1.9, 384.7	< 0.01
Modesty	3.78 (0.56) ^a	3.73 (0.66) ^a	3.22 (0.56) ^b	81.76	2, 404	< 0.01
Emotionality	3.02 (0.43)	2.99 (0.34)	3.04 (0.21)	1.16	1.8, 365.1	0.31
Fearfulness	3.04 (0.60) ^b	3.00 (0.58) ^b	3.28 (0.40) ^a	18.73	2, 404	< 0.01
Anxiety	3.01 (0.74) ^a	2.90 (0.47) ^b	2.91 (0.28) ^{a,b}	2.98	1.6, 317.4	0.07
Dependence	2.71 (0.60) ^c	2.89 (0.55) ^b	3.00 (0.36) ^a	21.25	1.9, 391.9	< 0.01
Sentimentality	3.30 (0.70) ^a	3.18 (0.56) ^b	2.97 (0.38) ^c	24.02	1.8, 366.3	< 0.01
Extraversion	3.46 (0.51)^c	3.73 (0.50)^a	3.54 (0.33)^b	31.00	1.7, 349.0	< 0.01
Social self-esteem	3.91 (0.61) ^a	3.71 (0.65) ^b	3.63 (0.41) ^b	19.44	1.8, 363.6	< 0.01
Social boldness	2.98 (0.78) ^c	3.84 (0.59) ^a	3.65 (0.42) ^b	130.80	1.4, 283.3	< 0.01
Sociability	3.15 (0.68) ^c	3.60 (0.59) ^a	3.38 (0.35) ^b	38.02	1.7, 335.1	< 0.01
Liveliness	3.79 (0.65) ^a	3.78 (0.59) ^a	3.50 (0.40) ^b	31.02	1.9, 378.5	< 0.01
Agreeableness	2.86 (0.38)^a	2.78 (0.49)^b	2.71 (0.28)^b	8.88	1.9, 383.9	< 0.01
Forgiveness	2.81 (0.53) ^{a,b}	2.91 (0.62) ^a	2.79 (0.36) ^b	3.74	1.9, 377.3	0.03
Gentleness	3.05 (0.54) ^a	2.83 (0.63) ^b	2.67 (0.32) ^c	31.46	1.9, 378.5	< 0.01
Flexibility	2.66 (0.55) ^a	2.34 (0.57) ^c	2.50 (0.42) ^b	26.34	2, 404	< 0.01
Patience	2.93 (0.65) ^{a,b}	3.03 (0.63) ^a	2.87 (0.33) ^b	5.05	1.9, 379.4	0.01
Conscientiousness	3.60 (0.41)^b	3.68 (0.45)^a	3.41 (0.35)^c	37.67	1.9, 379.6	< 0.01
Organization	3.67 (0.77) ^{a,b}	3.66 (0.61) ^a	3.57 (0.40) ^b	2.39	1.6, 312.5	0.11
Diligence	3.42 (0.60) ^b	3.81 (0.55) ^a	3.37 (0.47) ^b	55.64	1.8, 357.8	< 0.01
Perfectionism	3.83 (0.54) ^a	3.73 (0.55) ^b	3.45 (0.42) ^c	43.41	1.8, 372.4	< 0.01
Prudence	3.49 (0.56) ^a	3.50 (0.55) ^a	3.28 (0.37) ^b	18.52	1.9, 391.2	< 0.01
Openness to experience	3.19 (0.48)^b	3.30 (0.35)^a	3.15 (0.24)^b	12.73	1.7, 337.5	< 0.01
Aesthetic appreciation	3.13 (0.83) ^c	3.48 (0.69) ^a	3.35 (0.34) ^b	20.42	1.9, 382.0	< 0.01
Inquisitiveness	3.57 (0.71) ^a	3.52 (0.59) ^a	3.31 (0.38) ^b	18.67	1.9, 379.7	< 0.01
Creativity	3.26 (0.61) ^a	3.24 (0.51) ^a	3.06 (0.41) ^b	11.06	1.7, 350.2	< 0.01
Unconventionality	2.79 (0.59) ^b	2.98 (0.59) ^a	2.89 (0.33) ^a	7.75	2, 404	< 0.01

Note: Domains are in bold type; facets are in regular type; Means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other in pairwise comparisons.

[†] Greenhouse-Geisser correction of degrees of freedom for violations of sphericity assumptions.

HEXACO-SPI shows high levels of convergent validity with the HEXACO-PI-R (i.e., convergent correlations ranged between 0.67 and 0.78 and discriminant correlations were all lower than $r = 0.25$; De Vries & Born, 2013) and consists of 104 items, of which 8 items measure the interstitial facets Altruism and Proactivity (four items each). We only used the 96 items that referred to the six HEXACO domains (16 items per domain scale) for both the self- and the other report versions. All items were answered on a 1–5 (strongly disagree–strongly agree) response scale. The alpha reliabilities of the domain scales in the self-report version were 0.74 (Honesty-Humility), 0.76 (Emotionality), 0.87 (Extraversion), 0.73 (Agreeableness), 0.78 (Conscientiousness), and 0.79 (Openness to Experience). The ICC(3,k) of the personality item profiles of all seven politicians ranged between 0.98 and 0.99. The English version of the HEXACO-SPI is available at <https://bit.ly/2C2XYZI>.

3. Results

All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 23.0 (IBM Corp., 2015). For each respondent, we averaged the six non-preferred politicians' scores. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the self-ratings, ratings of the preferred politician, and (averaged) ratings of the non-preferred politicians. To answer the research question, we conducted repeated measures analyses of variance with Greenhouse-Geisser correction of degrees of freedom for violations of sphericity assumptions to test for differences between self-rated, ratings of preferred politicians', and ratings of non-preferred politicians' personality.

Table 1 shows significant differences between self-ratings, ratings of preferred politicians, and ratings of non-preferred politicians on five out of six HEXACO-SPI domain scales. When comparing the ratings of preferred and non-preferred politicians, evaluative biases were most pronounced (and significant at $p < .01$) for honesty-humility

($d = 0.93$), extraversion ($d = 0.46$), conscientiousness ($d = 0.68$), and openness to experience ($d = 0.51$). By far the strongest differences were observed on honesty-humility ($F(2, 404) = 105.06$; $p < .01$), with respondents perceiving themselves somewhat higher on honesty-humility than preferred politicians, but substantially higher on honesty-humility than non-preferred politicians. Of the four facets of honesty-humility, the differences were most pronounced on greed avoidance and lowest on fairness, with preferred politicians scoring—on average—actually somewhat higher on fairness than the respondents themselves. The other two main differences on the HEXACO-SPI domain scales were observed for extraversion ($F(1.7, 349.0) = 31.00$; $p < .01$) and conscientiousness ($F(1.9, 379.6) = 37.67$; $p < .01$). A large difference was found on the social boldness facet of extraversion, with preferred and non-preferred politicians being perceived as much bolder than the respondents themselves. On the facet diligence of conscientiousness, preferred politicians were perceived as more diligent than both the respondents themselves and non-preferred politicians. Some mean domain scores masked variations in differences among mean facet scores. For instance, similar mean emotionality scores masked differences among the dependence and sentimentality facets, with non-preferred leaders perceived to be least dependent but most sentimental when compared to respectively self-ratings and ratings of preferred politicians. With respect to agreeableness, preferred politicians were perceived as least flexible but most patient when compared to self-ratings (in the case of flexibility) and ratings of non-preferred politicians.

In Table 2, we report the assumed similarity correlations. The first column shows the correlations between self-ratings and ratings of the preferred politician's personality. The second column shows the correlations between self-ratings and ratings of the non-preferred politician's personality. A test of difference of the assumed similarity correlations was conducted using Meng, Rosenthal, and Rubin's (1992) test for comparing correlated correlation coefficients, controlling for the

Table 2

Test of difference in correlated correlation coefficients of self-ratings (S) and preferred (P) politicians' ratings versus self-ratings and non-preferred (NP) politicians' ratings ($N = 203$).

	r_{S-P}	r_{S-NP}	(r_{P-NP})	z	p
Honesty-humility	0.34	0.00	(0.33)	4.18	< 0.01
Sincerity	0.25	−0.04	(0.26)	3.47	< 0.01
Fairness	0.37	0.26	(0.52)	1.76	0.04
Greed avoidance	0.14	−0.08	(0.27)	2.57	0.01
Modesty	0.32	0.17	(0.44)	2.07	0.02
Emotionality	0.27	0.09	(0.21)	2.08	0.02
Fearfulness	0.26	0.09	(0.12)	1.81	0.04
Anxiety	0.21	0.07	(0.25)	1.63	0.05
Dependence	0.34	0.16	(0.27)	2.16	0.02
Sentimentality	0.32	0.23	(0.35)	1.16	0.12
Extraversion	0.31	0.28	(0.58)	0.48	0.32
Social self-esteem	0.29	0.42	(0.39)	−1.84	0.97
Social boldness	0.07	−0.03	(0.60)	1.71	0.04
Sociability	0.11	0.07	(0.39)	0.57	0.28
Liveliness	0.42	0.43	(0.47)	−0.08	0.53
Agreeableness	0.18	0.06	(0.17)	1.34	0.09
Forgiveness	0.09	0.02	(0.19)	0.79	0.22
Gentleness	0.15	0.03	(0.18)	1.36	0.09
Flexibility	0.32	0.18	(0.34)	1.69	0.05
Patience	0.23	0.18	(0.21)	0.64	0.26
Conscientiousness	0.33	0.34	(0.52)	−0.10	0.54
Organization	0.12	0.19	(0.48)	−1.04	0.85
Diligence	0.24	0.10	(0.47)	1.93	0.03
Perfectionism	0.23	0.24	(0.44)	−0.07	0.53
Prudence	0.33	0.31	(0.30)	0.22	0.41
Openness to experience	0.45	0.03	(0.35)	5.41	< 0.01
Aesthetic appreciation	0.44	0.22	(0.30)	2.75	< 0.01
Inquisitiveness	0.48	0.26	(0.37)	2.97	< 0.01
Creativity	0.15	−0.01	(0.35)	2.00	0.02
Unconventionality	0.34	0.04	(0.02)	3.12	< 0.01

Note: Domains are in bold type; facets are in regular type; when comparing the two correlations, the bracketed correlations (r_{P-NP} ; i.e., between ratings of preferred and non-preferred politicians) are taken into account.

correlation between ratings of the preferred and non-preferred politician's personality. The results reveal the most pronounced differences on honesty-humility and openness to experience, with assumed similarity correlations higher among preferred politicians than among non-preferred politicians both for honesty-humility (supporting [Hypothesis 1](#)) and openness to experience (supporting [Hypothesis 2](#)). Facet analyses show that these results hold for all facets of honesty-humility and openness to experience. Interestingly, assumed similarity correlations were also significantly higher among preferred politicians than among non-preferred politicians for emotionality. Furthermore, assumed similarity correlations were relatively high among both preferred and non-preferred politicians for extraversion and conscientiousness.

4. Discussion

The popularity of a number of controversial politicians has led to an increased interest in the assessment and perception of the personality of politicians ([Nai & Maier, 2018](#); [Visser et al., 2017](#); [Wright & Tomlinson, 2018](#)). In this study, we explored voters' evaluative and value-related biases when rating preferred and non-preferred politicians. The results showed that evaluative biases occurred on honesty-humility, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, with higher voters' ratings for preferred politicians than for non-preferred politicians on these traits. Compared to self-ratings, politicians were generally seen as lower on honesty-humility and higher on extraversion, suggesting that politicians are generally seen as somewhat narcissistic ([De Vries, 2018](#); [Lee & Ashton, 2005](#)). Furthermore, the results offer support for the occurrence of value-related biases, i.e., voters are more likely to perceive preferred politicians—but not non-preferred politicians—as similar to themselves on honesty-humility and openness to experience, in agreement with the assumed similarity effect ([Lee et al., 2009](#);

[Thielmann et al., 2018](#)).

The difference between self-, preferred politicians' and non-preferred politicians' ratings was especially pronounced for honesty-humility. The differences between preferred politicians and non-preferred politicians was greatest for the facets sincerity ($d = 0.87$) and modesty ($d = 0.84$), whereas the difference with self-ratings was most pronounced for the facet greed avoidance (respectively $d = 0.91$ (with preferred politicians) and $d = 1.64$ (with non-preferred politicians)). Such a very strong effect suggests that voters generally perceive politicians to be more interested in their own career and advancing their own self-interests (i.e., status and money) than in the interest of the public. This low level of perceived trustworthiness of the governing class in general and 'typical' politicians in particular has been linked to the rise in populism ([Oliver & Rahn, 2016](#)), with its concomitant increase in tension between disenchanted citizens and supporters of the status quo, resulting in a desire of the disenfranchised to be directly heard instead of being indirectly represented by career—and commonly regarded as 'elitist'—politicians (e.g., [Kaltwasser, 2012](#)).

Apart from honesty-humility, politicians, and especially preferred politicians, were seen as higher on extraversion, especially on the social boldness facet. Social boldness may be regarded as a prototypical trait of politicians; i.e., they need to take on a bold leadership role to make their opinions heard. The finding aligns with studies on the relations between personality and leadership that show that extraversion is the most important predictor of leadership and charisma perceptions ([Bono & Judge, 2004](#); [De Vries, 2012](#)). The combination of perceptions of high extraversion and low honesty-humility is exemplary of a narcissistic personality ([De Vries, 2018](#); [Lee & Ashton, 2005](#)). That is, politicians appear to be typically viewed as somewhat narcissistic, i.e., self-centered, craving for admiration, and with a grandiose belief in one's talents and importance.

In line with earlier findings ([Wright & Tomlinson, 2018](#)), preferred politicians were seen as higher on conscientiousness and openness to experience than non-preferred politicians, but unlike these earlier findings, preferred politicians were not seen as higher on agreeableness and lower on emotionality. The contrast between these findings may have to do with differences in samples and politicians investigated, but also with differences in Big Five and HEXACO operationalizations of agreeableness and emotional stability (Big Five) versus emotionality (HEXACO) (see [Ashton, Lee, & De Vries, 2014](#), for a full explanation of these differences).

This study offers support for the importance of political preference in the assumed similarity of politicians on two personality variables: honesty-humility and openness to experience. In line with [Lee et al. \(2009\)](#), with higher (lower) self-rated honesty-humility and openness to experience, preferred politicians are perceived to also be on average higher (lower) on respectively honesty-humility and openness to experience, whereas assumed similarity does not play a role in ratings of non-preferred politicians. The findings are in line with the hypothesis that people's own socio-political attitudes are projected on people who one likes and/or votes for, such as preferred politicians, and that this is especially true for the two dimensions that are related to socio-political attitudes, honesty-humility and openness to experience ([Lee et al., 2009](#); [Lee et al., 2010](#); [Leone, Chirumbolo, & Desimoni, 2012](#)). Interestingly, the effect sizes of assumed similarity on honesty-humility and openness to experience are more in line with the findings among friends than among strangers ([Thielmann et al., in press](#)), suggesting that—although people might not know these politicians personally—voters deem it important to vote for politicians who have similar socio-political attitudes as they have themselves.

However, self-based heuristics also played a role in ratings of emotionality among preferred politicians and in ratings of extraversion and conscientiousness among both preferred and non-preferred politicians. Emotionality has been found to be significantly related to social worldviews (i.e., whether the world is regarded as a 'competitive jungle' and a 'dangerous world') that are important in determining

socio-political attitudes (Leone, Desimoni, & Chirumbolo, 2012), suggesting that especially in the political arena, voters may project assumptions associated with emotionality on preferred politicians. With respect to extraversion and conscientiousness, a hypothesis may be that voters use self-based heuristics for ratings on traits that are deemed prototypical of all politicians, whether preferred or not. That is, a 'self-based prototypicality bias' may be at play, suggesting that those traits that are important for performing in a specific function will be projected onto a target person based on self-based heuristics.

There are two limitations of our study. First, we used a binary approach of dividing politicians in a preferred and non-preferred group based on party preference. Although this may have resulted in somewhat conservative estimates of the effects in our study (i.e., the difference between the preferred and least preferred politician are likely greater), future studies might like to include individual preference ratings of politicians instead. Second, a reviewer noted that mass media use may exacerbate some of the effects observed in this study. Consequently, future studies might like to control for the way politicians are framed in the respondents' preferred mass media outlets.

To conclude, not only do the results provide a snapshot of voters' personality perceptions of politicians, it also partly provides an explanation of how these ratings come about. In general, preferred politicians were seen as higher on honesty-humility, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience than non-preferred politicians. Furthermore, politicians in general were perceived as low on honesty-humility and high on extraversion, suggesting that voters perceive politicians as especially narcissistic. Self-based heuristics also played a role in the perception of a politician's personality with ratings on honesty-humility and openness to experience susceptible to self-based personality projections when a politician was preferred over other politicians. However, assumed similarity correlations were also high for extraversion and conscientiousness among preferred and non-preferred politicians, suggesting that not only values, but also self-based prototypicality biases may play a role in voters' perceptions of politicians' personality.

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